

Conservation of natural habitats and sustainable flood risk management in Osam river basin, Bulgaria

Osam river basin covers a number of valuable conservation areas, situated mainly in the floodplains and adjacent lands. The natural habitats, surrounded by urban and agriculture lands, harbour significant biodiversity and have an important function as natural eco-corridors. The conservation value of this area is approved by the environmental NGOs, scientific institution and Bulgarian government and part of it is proposed to be designated as Natura 2000 sites (Devetashko plato, Obnova-Karaman dol and Nikopolsko plato).

The river bed was very twisted in the past, forming many meanders. In XX century however it was significantly modified by building dykes, cutting the oxbows and draining the floodplain areas. All this resulted in decline of the riparian forests, biodiversity loss, as well as in erosion of the river bottom and banks. Decreasing the natural retention capacity of the river bed and the intensive land use in the former floodplains increases the flood risk in cases of torrent discharge. That was clearly demonstrated during the floods in years 2005-2006.

The few remaining riparian forests along the main stream and the oxbows have large conservation values today. Located between vast agriculture lands and urbanized terrains, they are important ecological corridors and habitats for endangered animal and plant species. Their existence and ecosystem functioning however are threatened by draining because of the morphological and hydrological changes in the river, logging and intensive land use practices.



Project's aims and actions

The present project aims to study the management problems of Osam river basin, to propose integrated actions for biodiversity conservation and flood prevention and involve the stakeholders active in this field.

Sites for follow-up demonstration actions such as floodplain and river arms restoration, re-forestation or optimization of the land use will be identified within the Natura 2000 sites. The possible actions for habitat restoration and flood mitigation will be assessed in terms of the potential impact on the conservation status and hydro-engineering feasibility. The stakeholders will be involved in the elaboration of Action plan for sustainable flood risk management by workshop and expert meetings. Establishment of Sub-basin commission for Osam river will be proposed and the municipalities will be supported in development of further environmental projects and appropriate utilizing the EU funds in the field of environment.

The project contributes to the implementation of the European policies in regard of the biodiversity conservation (Bird Directive 79/401/EEC, Habitat Directive 92/43/EEC), integrated water management (WFD 2000/60/EEC) and sustainable flood risk management (Floods Directive 2007/60/EEC).



Implementation and budget

The project is being implemented by Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation with the financial support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Sofia under the Small Nature Management Projects Programme (Matra/KNIP).

The total budget is 12'680 EUR.



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